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Lake-saving veto is a promise kept

As a candidate for governor, John Kasich met with a group of Lake Erie lovers and promised that, if he was elected, "people who have spent a lifetime on the lake" would have a friend in the governor's office.

He made that promise last July, during a campaign appearance in Port Clinton.

A year later, he kept it.

By preventing leeches in the legislature from sucking the life out of the lake, Kasich did more than defy members of his own party. He vetoed an egregious piece of legislation that would have permitted unregulated and unconscionable withdrawals from the smallest, shallowest and, above all, most fragile of all the Great Lakes.

Absent Kasich's veto, this bill would have exposed Greater Cleveland's most precious asset — its best hope for a vibrant economy in the future — to massive withdrawals from the lake and some rivers in the Lake Erie basin.

It would have allowed a business to siphon 5 million gallons a day from the lake and 2 million from many streams — without any meaningful regulation. Supporters in the legislature and the business community — including, inexplicably, the Greater Cleveland Partnership — mislabeled it as a jobs bill.

But this was no economic development tool. It was a gift to water wasters — companies looking to make a fast buck at the expense of a lake already facing growing problems with rising levels of phosphorus and other dangerous contaminants.

Big-city newspapers across Ohio urged Kasich to veto the bill. And when he did, State Rep. Lynn Wachtmann, a Republican from Northwest Ohio, opined, "I think the governor is playing up to The Plain Dealer and other newspapers." State Sen. Tim Grendell, who has a long history of acting against Lake Erie's best interests, had previously urged the governor "not to be misled by the factually false and grossly misleading information coming from liberal media sources."

So much for all that garbage about newspapers no longer mattering.

What exactly moved Kasich to veto the bill isn't really important. What matters most is that he did.

However, in fairness, Republican legislative leaders did have some cause to grumble that the Kasich administration misled them into thinking he would sign the water bill. On more than one occasion as the bill moved through committee, administration officials assured legislators that their concerns about the bill were minor — and some had already been addressed by changes.

But beware: Although Kasich's veto will not be overridden, this isn't the end of it.

Expect the leeches to return. My guess is they'll slap some lipstick on their pig and try again to drain the lake.

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LARKIN

FROM G1

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Legislators can't be trusted on this issue — especially in the House, where Speaker Bill Batchelder already has engineered passage of unconscionable legislation pertaining to charter schools and voting laws. Both those attempts were thwarted by a more responsible Republican leadership in the Senate.

The House hurt Ohio's reputation. A Kasich signature on the water bill would have gone a ways toward wrecking it entirely. There's a reason why leaders in other Great Lakes states — a great many of them Republicans — were appalled at the Ohio legislature's attempt to ruin an asset they all share. And it's the same reason former Govs. George Voinovich and Bob Taft opposed the water bill:

It would have violated the spirit — and some claim the letter — of the Great Lakes Compact. And it would have guaranteed that Ohio would have been a defendant in costly lawsuits filed by its Great Lakes neighbors.

The world's largest body of fresh water represents the best long-term hope of all the Great Lakes states to reverse their 60-year decline. In part, the Great Lakes Compact is an environmental measure. More important, it's an economic-development vehicle. And it was the jobs angle that drove its approval by all eight Great Lakes states, Congress and former President George W. Bush.

The compact's goal is simple: Keep the lakes clean and prevent harmful withdrawals. The lake lovers told Kasich that a year ago. And they reminded him of it 12 days ago, when he returned to Port Clinton for a meeting with many of the same people who had heard him speak there a year earlier. One of them was Rick Unger, president of the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, whose group desperately wanted a Kasich veto.

"We're ecstatic," said Unger. "The governor proved he cares about the lake. This would have been a very, very bad thing for Lake Erie."

Had the governor made a different decision, Unger is certain that massive water withdrawals would have left "an awful lot of boats sitting in mud."

One would think those geniuses in the legislature would have figured that out before they voted.